

The Islamic representation of Tatarstan as an answer to the equalization of the Russian regions

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Abstract

© 2015 Association for the Study of Nationalities. This article presents a study of Islamic religious symbols involved in maintaining the special status of the Tatars in post-Soviet Tatarstan. It explores how regional ethnic elites in Tatarstan use Islam (the discourse of the history of Islam in the region and Islamic symbols in the representation of the region) as a tool for legitimizing their privileged positions in the region. In addition, the article examines how Islamic culture enters into the everyday life and public space of the region, thereby, in a sense enforcing social borders between different ethnic groups. This study has two aims: a theoretical analysis of religious symbols' role in the struggle for status in the ethnic hierarchy and the practical application of the developed theoretical framework to the case of post-Soviet Tatarstan. The author concludes that after the system of ethnic federalism was abolished in Russia, Tatars have retained their special status by appealing to Islam.

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Keywords

federalism in Russia, identity politics, Islam, nationalism, politicization of religion, regionalism, religious nationalism, Tatarstan